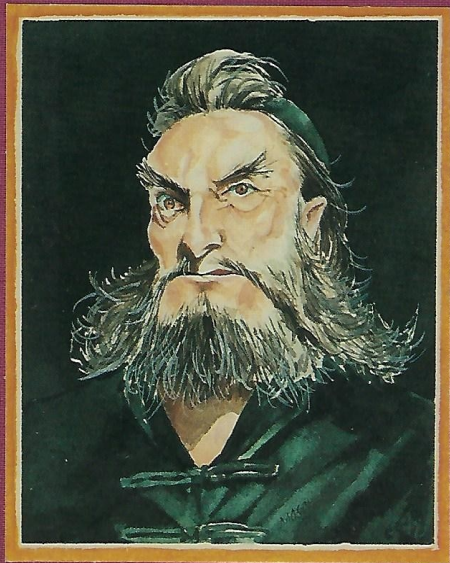


THE GUILD
Shakespeare



THE GUILD

Shakespeare

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE
LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST

BY
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY
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Forewords by
Kelly McGillis and Michael Langham

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FOREWORD

to

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

by Kelly McGillis



When I was asked to write this Foreword, I was in Washington's Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger, performing the role of Portia in Michael Langham's spring 1988 production of *The Merchant of Venice*. With the exhilaration and self-confidence that comes from hearing applause, I agreed wholeheartedly and with great enthusiasm to share my thoughts about the play. Now, more than two years later, with my vivid memories of the experience fading, I am

KELLY MCGILLIS played Portia in a 1988 production of *The Merchant of Venice* at Washington's Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger. In 1989 she returned there to appear as Viola in *Twelfth Night*, directed by artistic director Michael Kahn. For the role of Viola in *Twelfth Night* she received a Helen Hayes Award. Earlier Miss McGillis had won plaudits for the role of Nina in a Kennedy Center production of *A Seagull*, directed by Peter Sellars. She is best known, however, for her work in such films as *Reuben, Reuben*, *Witness*, *Top Gun*, and *The Accused*. Currently she is producing and starring in a film of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

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acutely aware of how much more I'd like to know about the comedy, not to mention the works of Shakespeare generally.

I'm reminded of my first exposure to the mysteries of this brilliant playwright during my days at the Juilliard School's actor-training program in New York, and I feel as if I am back at the beginning, understanding little or nothing at all. I suspect that it is at least partly for this reason that people in the theatre are drawn to Shakespeare: because no matter how well we think we've managed to get inside a particular character or play, another look will tell us just how much we have yet to grasp. This is the wonder of this immortal genius, and it is from the viewpoint of an actress who stands in awe of him that I return to *The Merchant of Venice*, as if for the first time, now.

I've been asked what I found most challenging about playing Portia. I think that one of the greatest difficulties the part presents is that of portraying a girl who is transforming herself into a woman. Portia starts out in the play confined by the restrictions of her dead father. Through the casket sequences she begins to flower as an autonomous personality. By the Trial Scene, and even more by the last scene in the play, she's a woman who takes control. But she does so with a great sense of humor, with a spritely charm and lightness.

Portia is the ultimate good girl. She's impish, and in the first scene in which we see her she is openly questioning the will of a father who has deprived her of the ability to choose her own husband. By the end of the scene, she is convinced that her wise father truly loved her and meant well by what he did, and so she decides that it would not be right to rebel against the conditions he's imposed upon her. (One of the touches I enjoy in the play, by

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FOREWORD BY KELLY MCGILLIS

the way, is that Portia's problem is not unique: it has a parallel in Jessica. In her case, a living father's intolerable domination forces a daughter who feels unloved to flee rather than remain obedient.)

Some people believe that when Bassanio comes to woo Portia, she gives him an unfair advantage over the other suitors. I disagree. In my view, Portia wouldn't do that; she wouldn't disobey her father. But Nerissa has fewer scruples about helping Bassanio find the way to Portia's heart, and in Michael Langham's directing of that scene the song that hints at the lead casket was presented as Nerissa's idea, not Portia's.

I came to the Trial Scene with an open mind. I rehearsed it many different ways, trying to figure out whether Portia knew exactly what she was going to do before she showed up in the Venetian courtroom. I tried to ask questions of the playwright, to explore what choices the scene leaves open to the actress playing Portia. Even though everybody I knew of who had done the scene or commented on it was convinced that Portia had everything worked out in advance, I wasn't so sure. I was curious to find out what would happen if she didn't know what she needed to know—what it would be like for her to discover it right there. For me it made the scene more immediate. And even though the director's eventual decision was to present Portia as a trial judge who proceeded from a well-planned script, I continued to feel that there might be some degree of spontaneity and improvisation in Portia's approach to the courtroom situation.

I don't see Portia as out to get Shylock. She's horrified by what he plans to do, and she knows she has an ace in her pocket—the law—that will enable her to prevent him from carrying out his

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designs. But she doesn't want to have to play her ace, and she hopes that Shylock will relent without being compelled to do so. She'd much prefer to have Shylock change his mind. But he just keeps on pushing for justice. Portia gives him every opportunity to avoid the trap he's putting himself into. Several times she asks him, "Are you sure? Are you sure?" But he refuses to listen, and eventually she has to teach him a lesson about what justice really means.

In the Folger production, Michael Langham omitted the lines in which Antonio says that Shylock must convert to Christianity if he wishes to retain his means of making a living. In my opinion this was a good cut, given the differences between the beliefs that prevailed in Shakespeare's society and those that audiences bring to the theatre today. It seems to me that to make Shylock become a Christian in a modern production of *The Merchant of Venice* is to imply that he behaves as he does, not because he's a vengeful man, but because he's Jewish. I'd hate to have a performance of the play give the impression that all Jews are like Shylock, and that the only cure for such behavior is a new religion.

Many people take this play to be the story of Shylock. I see it as much more evenly divided among the characters. It's named for the Merchant of Venice, and one could argue that it's his story if it belongs primarily to one person. For me, it's fundamentally a play about love and about sacrifice. You have echoes of love throughout, and the play ends, not with the courtroom, but with the lovers. The final scene takes place in Belmont with the lovers becoming reunited and reinstating their vows to one another. I'm bothered by productions in which the play stops abruptly after

the Trial Scene. I think that does a disservice to the playwright. It is very unfair to characters other than Shylock, and to other relationships in the play, and it leaves the comedy with no resolution.

I'm sometimes asked if I think that Portia sees Antonio as a rival for the love of Bassanio. I don't at all. One of the wonderful things about Portia is that right after Bassanio picks the correct casket, and then news comes from Venice about Antonio's plight, Portia tells Bassanio to return to Venice immediately. It's her wedding night, and that's beautiful self-sacrifice. It's not trite; she says what she means, because she fully understands how deep and important the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio is. Then, of course, she herself goes to the courtroom to save Antonio's life. After the trial, when Antonio comes to Belmont, she says, and means, "Sir, you are very welcome." I can't see why anyone would choose to play Portia as though she were jealous of Bassanio's love for Antonio, when the script shows so clearly that she's not.

Nowadays Antonio tends to be depicted as a man with a homosexual attachment to Bassanio. I have to say that I consider that a mistake too. In this play Shakespeare treats love in a very poetic way. He conveys a sense of the kind of love that transcends the physical, a selfless love that matters more than life itself. It's very demeaning to Bassanio and Antonio's love for each other for it to be reduced to an erotic relationship.

I really like this play. It's a great play for modern audiences. I find the characters beautiful—even Shylock, because it seems to me that he does learn something in the end about justice and mercy. But the person in *The Merchant of Venice* who has the most

to say to me is Portia. I find that people respond to her; they like her, they admire her, and they learn from her.

I never cease to be amazed by Shakespeare's female characters. So many of them—Viola and Rosalind, for example—seem to me to be the very embodiment of womanhood. They are insightful and intuitive. They are neither belittling nor pitying, and certainly not self-pitying. They make astonishing sacrifices, but they do so in an unassuming way that can make us overlook the fact that they really are bestowing great gifts. And perhaps the most wonderful of them all is Portia: an all-encompassing, all-embracing woman, a woman who exudes great love and great joy.

FOREWORD

to

LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST

by Michael Langham



No evidence exists that *Love's Labor's Lost* had any kind of popularity from Shakespeare's day until early in the twentieth century. Indeed it bears the distinction, together with *Troilus and Cresida*, of having enjoyed over three hundred years of almost total neglect. But the gradual reappraisal of the stage-worthiness of Shakespeare's works that occurred in the first part of this century led to the discovery that what seemed *on the page* the most relentlessly Elizabethan play of them all could be revealed *in performance* as a fresh, accessible, and brilliant work of art.

Failing miserably at various attempts to read it, my first expe-

MICHAEL LANGHAM has been Artistic Director of The Stratford Festival of Canada and The Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. He is currently Director of the Drama Division at the Juilliard School in New York. Among his numerous directorial credits are a French version of *Richard III*, a Dutch version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brody* on Broadway.

rience of the play was in the theatre at Stratford-on-Avon in a production by a novice director named Peter Brook. I must confess that the Watteau-inspired, exquisitely sad quality of the production excited me far more than the play. But it did serve to introduce me to a work that I subsequently grew to love.

Let us briefly review the plot. The young King of Navarre and three friends, in pursuit of immortality, decide to drop out of society and seclude themselves within the King's court for three years' undistracted study. So earnest is this new-born "Academe" in its attempt to prolong life by turning its back on it that all four "scholars" sign an oath denying them the company of women for the duration.

Almost before the ink is dry on the King's edict forbidding such converse, four lovely distractions appear at the gate: the Princess of France and three ladies-in-waiting. Their mission is diplomatic, and the King is forced to relax his rules long enough to conduct state affairs. Because of the oath the ladies are lodged in a tent in the royal park.

State affairs become affairs of the heart as each of the young men grows infatuated with each of the young women. Love verses are secretly delivered, but not secretly enough, and the men find each other out. When their outrage has dissolved, through the thrilling discovery of mutual guilt, into a deeper comradeship, some brilliantly self-deluding rationalizations persuade them that their loving is, after all, "lawful" and that their oaths are not, in fact, broken. Whereupon they abandon their studies and openly turn all their energies to the winning of the Princess and her ladies.

From the start of the "Academe" it is clear that essential

services—domestic help, meals (including dairy products)—will be made available. Also, as relief from heavy studying, occasional recreation like hunting will be allowed, as well as some entertainment. These services necessitate others being in residence besides the "scholars" themselves. And the new law forbidding female contact applies to all of them.

Prominent amongst those present for entertainment's sake is a Spaniard named Don Armado, who harbors delusions of grandeur in extremis, and a clown called Costard, who is forever at odds with the English language. It is Costard who first violates the new law. Armado discovers him with the dairy maid, Jaquenetta, and instantly informs on him. The King, blind to the omen implicit in Costard's lapse, consigns him to prison with Armado as his keeper.

The truth is that Armado secretly craves Jaquenetta himself and cannot resist the temptation first to pour out his heart in a letter to her, and then to offer Costard freedom if he will secretly deliver it. Costard takes his freedom and the letter and is off to Jaquenetta when he meets Berowne, one of the "scholars," who persuades him to slip a secret note to the French lady Rosaline. The clownish Costard gives Armado's letter to Rosaline and Berowne's to Jaquenetta, and much confusion follows.

It is at this point that the two plots converge. The King orders Armado, with the help of the Schoolmaster, the Curate, and other villagers, to prepare an entertainment to honor the Princess.

There follows a series of "divertissements," led off by the King and his colleagues, who strive with all their linguistic resource and histrionic panache to delight, thrill, charm, and finally

conquer their loved ones. But the ladies are ruthless in their mockery of this ostentatious rhetoric, these ill-conceived conceits; what is more, they regard any declarations of love made by such perjurers with the deepest suspicion. The men retreat with bruised pride to the sidelines and are replaced by Armado and company in "The Pageant of the Nine Worthies."

This show proves extraordinarily inept, and the King's men seize on it as an excuse to unload their bitterness—verbally lacerating each performer. The Curate and the Schoolmaster, stunned by the abusive hilarity, retire in disarray. Armado struggles gamely to do his best by Hector (the Worthy he is playing): "Sweet chucks," he says, "beat not the bones of the buried; when he breathed he was a man." But then Costard caps his ordeal by spitefully naming Armado the father of the child now stirring in Jaquenetta's belly. As the scandalized gasps subside, "Hector" responds memorably: "Dost thou infamonize me among potentates? Thou shalt die!" The mocking and heckling intensifies, now turning quite savage and frenzied, until it is gradually hushed by the growing awareness of a cold, still presence; a messenger in state-mourning has arrived.

When Mercade informs the Princess that the King her father is dead and that she is now Queen, the play's mood plunges at a stroke from August to December. The French party must leave for home at once; the funeral and twelve months' mourning lie ahead. The men plead urgently for answers to their offers of marriage, only to discover that all their clever sonnets and high-flown protestations of love have been perceived by the women as a game, no more—just a means of passing the time. The men are told that if they are really serious about world-without-end bar-

gains, then they must prove it with more than "taffeta phrases, silken terms precise."

Oaths began the comedy. Oaths of another kind end it. The men finally swear that they will employ the twelve months' forced separation as a period of penance, of redemptive trial, and of growth away from affectation. Armado enters and tries to salvage some of his lost dignity: "I am a votary: I have vowed to Jaquenetta to hold the plough for her sweet love *three year*." Then he leads the villagers in a farewell song. As the lovers part, the lyric recapitulates the spring, summer, and winter movements of the comedy. It is not, strictly speaking, a comedy-like ending, for Jack hath not Jill. Love's labour indeed seems to be lost. But still there lingers a promise—albeit faint—that some of it may yet be retrieved.

This word-mad, mocking pastoral is a satire on human communication—and especially on affectations of language. From the creaking antiquity of Armado, forever mistaking brevity for commonness, as he treads vainly through dense clouds of long-winded obscurantism, to the latinizing pedantry of Holofernes, who would dare to construe a daffodil in the long grass, to the indulgences of Berowne's hyperbolic romanticism, to the dumb incoherence of Costard, Jaquenetta, and Dull, stunned and bamboozled by this battery of verbal inebriation, the various misuses of language are held up, together with leaden scholasticism, to a brilliantly sustained cuckoo-call of ridicule.

It is the Princess and her ladies who are ultimately driven to make the point that "A jest's prosperity lies in the ear / Of him that hears it; never in the tongue / Of him that makes it." They

remind us that language is a potentially valuable instrument for human communication and understanding—which must include the subject of love—and that those who use it should be concerned with the character and feelings of those who hear it.

Editor's Introduction to

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

and

LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST

Although *The Merchant of Venice* is not among the handful of Shakespearean tragicomedies we usually refer to as “problem plays,” it is a drama that has frequently occasioned controversy. It touches on sensitive issues—race relations, religious differences, and what our day calls human rights—and it does so in ways that mark it as the product of an era that now seems comparatively parochial, if not intolerant, in many of its social and political attitudes. Notwithstanding the play’s many virtues, therefore—among them the fact that it can be shown to be ahead of its time in its approach to precisely those topics that are most likely to concern a twentieth-century reader or theatregoer—*The Merchant of Venice* is sometimes treated as a work of art from which modern audiences need to be protected.

However troubling such a stance may be, it is not altogether surprising, because—to borrow a clause from Shakespeare’s most endearing clown (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, III.i.9–10)—

“There are things in this Comedy . . . that will never please” even those who regard it as one of the author’s masterpieces.

We can no longer be expected to smile, for example, when the heroine exults over the departure of a Moorish suitor and casts a slur on his swarthy complexion (II.vii.79). We no longer react with automatic disapproval when we learn that a shrewd moneylender charges interest on his loans. We no longer think it a matter to be passed over lightly when we hear that a respectable Venetian merchant has scorned the “Usurer” as a “Cut-throat Dog” and spat upon his “Jewish Gaberdine” (I.iii.112–13). We no longer consider it laughable when the Jew’s apprentice describes his master as “the very Devil” (II.ii.28), and when Shylock’s own daughter spurns him and his religious heritage, elopes with a frivolous Gentile, and finances her honeymoon with a casket of the old man’s treasure. We no longer delight in the derision the moneylender suffers when he laments the loss of his “Ducats” and recoils at a report that the disrespectful Jessica has pawned her father’s most precious heirloom for a monkey (III.i). And above all, we no longer suspend our discomfort when we observe the proceedings of a kangaroo court in which the aggrieved Shylock falls victim to a clever “Judge” who can manipulate the statutes of Venice at will, spring a defendant who has already entered a guilty plea, and convict and sentence the infuriated but law-abiding man who has come to the bar as plaintiff.

No, these are aspects of *The Merchant of Venice* that invariably raise questions in the minds of today’s playgoers. But the moment that causes us the most difficulty is one that was evidently meant to be viewed in Shakespeare’s time as a display of compassion and generosity: the redeemed Merchant’s pronouncement

that he will spare his defeated accuser’s life and forgive half his fine if Shylock will bestow his blessing on the daughter and son-in-law who have wronged him and immediately “become a Christian” (IV.i.390).

No matter how the Trial Scene is staged, Antonio’s proviso will almost inevitably impress a modern audience as evidence that “the Quality of Mercy” is “strained” (IV.i.187) in the courtroom of Shakespeare’s drama. What was intended, no doubt, as a manifestation of Grace is more likely to strike viewers of our time as yet another instance of the kind of “Christian Example” (III.i.75) that has driven the oppressed Shylock to insist upon his pound of flesh in the first place.

So why do we continue to read and produce *The Merchant of Venice*? And how do we deal with ethical and theological premises that unmistakably locate the work in an earlier and less pluralistic stage of Western civilization?

The answer to the first question resides in the enduring power of the play itself, in Shakespeare’s eloquent exploration of dilemmas so basic to human nature that they are unlikely to be resolved by any conceivable advance in cultural understanding or social and political justice. The answer to the second question resides in us, in our ability to exercise the historical sensibility required to carry ourselves back, if only for the duration of the dramatic action, to the presuppositions of a theatre quite different from our own.

To facilitate an imaginative return to Shakespeare’s age, we must first recognize that, for all the vividness of its characters and all the urgency of the drives that motivate them, the story detailed in *The Merchant of Venice* has at least as much to do with the abstract

realms of fairy tale and religious allegory as it does with the everyday affairs of getting and spending in a flourishing Renaissance capital. Thus, if Portia is on the one hand a flesh-and-blood woman with a real human being's aspirations and desires, she is at the same time a symbolic ideal and the object of a romantic and spiritual adventure with analogies to Jason's legendary quest for the Golden Fleece. Portia presides over a setting whose name means "Beautiful Mountain," and one of the laws of Belmont—as fundamental to the workings of this locale in the play as the laws of profit and loss are to the Venetian Rialto—is that only a deserving suitor will be able to find the key to the casket that contains this "wondrous" Lady's portrait.

"I stand for Sacrifice," Portia tells the wooer she would choose if her dead father's will permitted (III.ii.57). In so doing she compares herself to a mythical maiden about to be offered to the Gods. It follows that the bold Bassanio must show himself to be the Hercules who wins her love by releasing her from captivity. Cultivated Elizabethans would have known that the mighty strongman was sometimes likened to Christ in terms of the Redeemer's victory over the power of sin, and they would therefore have found it fitting that Bassanio sets Portia free by selecting the casket that represents a commitment to "give and hazard all."

Far from the profligate spendthrift his initial request for venture capital might appear to make him, Bassanio is compelled to demonstrate that he is the only kind of man who could possibly qualify for the benefits of Belmont: not one who is drawn to Portia solely for "what many Men desire" (like Morocho, who opts for the gold casket and wins only a death's head), and not one who is puffed up with a proud sense of his own deservings

(like Arragon, who picks the silver casket and garners a fool's head), but one who can perceive the underlying value of a "meager Lead" container whose "Outward Show" only seems to be at odds with the Lady whose "Golden Locks" it holds (III.ii.104, 73, 92).

Appropriately, the motto Bassanio chooses identifies him, like Portia, as one who stands for "Sacrifice." And it is also "Sacrifice" that associates both lovers with Bassanio's friend and benefactor, Anthonio.

The Merchant is presented from the beginning as a man whose lot is "a Sad one" (I.i.78). We may be curious about the causes of his melancholy, and we may find it difficult to reconcile his spiteful treatment of Shylock with his otherwise charitable behavior. But we are no doubt to admire the seemingly unconditional magnanimity with which Anthonio volunteers to "give and hazard all he hath" to underwrite the love-voyage of a soul-mate who is already deeply in debt to him.

It is possible that we are to think the Merchant imprudent in trusting all his resources to Fortune. Once the fickle Goddess has exacted her terrible price, moreover, we are probably to wonder if Anthonio's zeal for martyrdom isn't prompted in part by a desire to link Bassanio to himself in a timeless bond that will rival, if not surpass, the one that now ties Bassanio to Portia. When he is finally brought to the point of baring his breast to deliver the pound of flesh his creditor demands, however, there can be little question that Anthonio's position is meant to remind us of the "man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4) and his affirmation that "greater love hath no man than this," that he "lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

In many respects Anthonio's crucifical gesture is what differentiates the "Spirit" of the Merchant of Venice, and of the play that bears his name, from the kind of "Law" embodied in an adversary who would cut out his debtor's heart (IV.i.371, 142). "I stand for Judgment," proclaims Shylock at the beginning of the Trial Scene (IV.i.103). He thereby defines himself not only in contrast with the "Sacrifice" symbolized by Portia and Bassanio and now by Anthonio, but also in distinction from those who acknowledge a need for Grace (a concept embedded in the very institution of sacrifice, as noted in such Biblical passages as Psalm 51:17 and Hebrews 9:26-28). "What Judgment shall I dread," Shylock asks, "doing no Wrong?" Then, disregarding Portia's reminder of the warning implicit in Matthew 6:12, he proclaims "My Deeds upon my Head; I crave the Law" (IV.i.89, 209).

These words turn out to be a snare, not only in light of the Christian theology that informs the play, but also in keeping with Hebraic teachings and rituals that Elizabethans would have seen as prototypes of that theology. For Shakespeare's contemporaries it was axiomatic that the demands of Divine Law could be met only through the forgiveness made possible by the supreme Sacrifice. Most of them would thus have seen Shylock not merely as a victim of injustice who errs by seeking to pervert the Law into an instrument of personal vengeance, but as a man naive and presumptuous enough to believe himself capable of standing faultless before the highest Court on the Day of Judgment.

For twentieth-century viewers of *The Merchant of Venice*, moved as we quite rightly are by the tormented outcry in Shylock's famous "Hath not a Jew Eyes?" speech (III.i.56-78), it is difficult to see beyond the moneylender's downfall to the play's

celebration of the power of Love, both human and divine, in the scenes that follow the trial. But it should not escape our notice that the comedy shifts in tone as the action moves from the conflict-riven court of Venice to a magical, moonlit night in Belmont.

Shortly after Shylock's departure, the disguised Portia requests Bassanio's wedding ring as a token of recompense for the extraordinary services of "the learned Judge." Bassanio at first demurs; when urged by Anthonio, however, he realizes that he must be willing to "give and hazard all" for the friend who has surrendered everything for him. Portia's little test is only a game, of course, and it brings some much-needed levity to the concluding movement of the play. At the same time it obliges Bassanio to "stand for Sacrifice" in a new way, risking the fortunes he has won in order to reciprocate the man whose sunken assets have made the wooer's success possible.

What is sometimes referred to as the Ring Plot places Bassanio's love for Anthonio, to whom he is "infinitely bound" (V.i.135), on an equal plane with Bassanio's love for Portia, to whom Bassanio is also infinitely bound, and to whom, without yet realizing it, Anthonio is now infinitely bound as well. By connecting and highlighting a circuit that links Bassanio to Anthonio and Anthonio to Portia and Portia to Bassanio, the epilogic sequel to the play's earlier trials encourages us to view all three relationships as aspects of the "sweet Harmony" (V.i.57) alluded to in Jessica and Lorenzo's reflections on the celestial Music of the Spheres. In the final analysis it turns Portia's ring into a metaphor of the higher love (*agape* in Greek, *caritas* in Latin) that transfigures and unifies the romantic love (*eros*) and brotherly love

(*philia*) that have been vying for dominance in the comedy's preceding scenes.

It is thematically fitting that Anthonio—who sacrifices himself one last time in V.i.249–53 to ratify the marital ties of Bassanio and Portia—should alone remain unwedded. But it is equally apt that at the end he profits from a “strange Accident” that restores to him the “Life and Living” he thought he had lost when all his argosies disappeared at sea (V.i.278, 286): With this “Manna” dropped from Heaven, he will now be able to return to the Rialto as a Merchant renewed. If he has been genuinely changed by what has happened to him, he may be inspired to work toward a more harmonious social order in Venice, perhaps even one that will include an offer of genuine fellowship to the moneylender who has been forced to the baptismal font.

The Merchant of Venice was probably written in 1596 or 1597. For his portrayal of Shylock Shakespeare drew some details from Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (circa 1589), and he was no doubt influenced as well by the 1594 execution of a Jewish physician, Roderigo Lopez, who had allegedly participated in a plot to poison his most famous patient, Queen Elizabeth. The playwright also incorporated material from a number of literary sources, among them Richard Robinson's 1577 translation of the medieval Latin collection known as the *Gesta Romanorum*, Anthony Munday's 1580 prose narrative *Zelauto, or the Fountain of Fame*, and Giovanni Fiorentino's Italian novelle *Il Pecorone* (written in the fourteenth century but not printed in Italy until 1588).

The Merchant of Venice was first published in a good 1600 quarto that appears to have been typeset either from a manu-

script in the author's own hand or from a faithful copy of it. The Quarto is the basis for all subsequent editions of the comedy.

A good 1598 quarto (the first printed play to bear Shakespeare's name on its title-page), also closely linked to the dramatist's own transcript, stands behind all later publications of *Love's Labor's Lost*. Because the title-page describes the text that follows as “newly corrected and augmented,” many of the comedy's editors infer that a faulty version of *Love's Labor's Lost* had been put into circulation sometime before 1598. If so, it may have reproduced a prior form of the play as represented in the earliest extant edition, parts of which show signs of revision and point to an initial date of composition that could have been as early as the late 1580s. The first reference to a performance indicates that *Love's Labor's Lost* was presented “before her Highness” during the Christmas festivities of either 1597 or 1598. The play's final alterations may have been prepared for that occasion, but most of the text as we have it appears to date from the mid-1590s.

The closest narrative parallel to *Love's Labor's Lost* is to be found in a 1581 English Court pageant, *The Four Foster Children of Desire*, for which the honored guest was the visiting Duc d'Alençon. Shakespeare was also aware of a 1578 embassy from Queen Catherine de Medici of France and her daughter, Marguerite de Valois, to Marguerite's estranged husband King Henry of Navarre. The purpose of this visit was to negotiate a dowry settlement in Aquitaine, and it included erotic entertainments by a “squadron” of attractive ladies in waiting. The playwright would have known, too, that Navarre's political allies included the Duc de Biron (Berowne) and the Duc de Longueville (Longaville),

(*philia*) that have been vying for dominance in the comedy's preceding scenes.

It is thematically fitting that Anthonio—who sacrifices himself one last time in V.i.249–53 to ratify the marital ties of Bassanio and Portia—should alone remain unwedded. But it is equally apt that at the end he profits from a “strange Accident” that restores to him the “Life and Living” he thought he had lost when all his argosies disappeared at sea (V.i.278, 286): With this “Manna” dropped from Heaven, he will now be able to return to the Rialto as a Merchant renewed. If he has been genuinely changed by what has happened to him, he may be inspired to work toward a more harmonious social order in Venice, perhaps even one that will include an offer of genuine fellowship to the moneylender who has been forced to the baptismal font.

The Merchant of Venice was probably written in 1596 or 1597. For his portrayal of Shylock Shakespeare drew some details from Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (circa 1589), and he was no doubt influenced as well by the 1594 execution of a Jewish physician, Roderigo Lopez, who had allegedly participated in a plot to poison his most famous patient, Queen Elizabeth. The playwright also incorporated material from a number of literary sources, among them Richard Robinson's 1577 translation of the medieval Latin collection known as the *Gesta Romanorum*, Anthony Munday's 1580 prose narrative *Zelauto, or the Fountain of Fame*, and Giovanni Fiorentino's Italian novelle *Il Pecorone* (written in the fourteenth century but not printed in Italy until 1588).

The Merchant of Venice was first published in a good 1600 quarto that appears to have been typeset either from a manu-

script in the author's own hand or from a faithful copy of it. The Quarto is the basis for all subsequent editions of the comedy.

A good 1598 quarto (the first printed play to bear Shakespeare's name on its title-page), also closely linked to the dramatist's own transcript, stands behind all later publications of *Love's Labor's Lost*. Because the title-page describes the text that follows as “newly corrected and augmented,” many of the comedy's editors infer that a faulty version of *Love's Labor's Lost* had been put into circulation sometime before 1598. If so, it may have reproduced a prior form of the play as represented in the earliest extant edition, parts of which show signs of revision and point to an initial date of composition that could have been as early as the late 1580s. The first reference to a performance indicates that *Love's Labor's Lost* was presented “before her Highness” during the Christmas festivities of either 1597 or 1598. The play's final alterations may have been prepared for that occasion, but most of the text as we have it appears to date from the mid-1590s.

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the sympathy, the fellow-feeling, that should accompany "Sport" (V.ii.845-56). Largely in imitation of the affectations of the "Gentles," Armado, Holofernes, and Nathaniel aspire to a high-falutin style that will elevate them above "the base Vulgar" (I.ii.48). In the process they all show themselves to be "a little o'erparted" (V.ii.583-84) and in their various ways ridiculous. One of the ironies of the plot is that in the end the four Lords who laugh most cruelly at the unworthiness of Armado and the other participants in the Pageant of the Nine Worthies are themselves dashed even more painfully by the audience they seek to please with a "Merriment" only slightly less ludicrous (V.ii.460-61).

By the end of the Pageant it becomes clear that the single worthy who can claim to have approached perfection in the discharge of his part (V.ii.500-5, 559-60) is the "resolute Pompey," "Pompey the Huge" (V.ii.686, 672). And by foisting the fruits of his labor onto "brave Hector," an Armado who turns out to be more than willing to play "the honest Troian" (V.ii.652, 661), Costard manages to evade "Remuneration" (III.i.137) for exploits that would otherwise have obliged *him* to "hold the Plough" for the "sweet Love" of Jaquenetta (V.ii.870).

For the four Lords, a labor prolonged a "Twelvemonth" may seem for the moment to be a labor lost. But in due course the outcome of their "Sport" will be an "end" more characteristic of Shakespearean comedy (V.ii.863-65). In the words of the presiding sprite of another play (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, III.ii.461-62), "Jack *shall* have Jill," and "Nought shall go ill."

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

